

## **Cytauxzoonosis in Cats**

Cytauxzoonosis is a serious, invariably fatal disease of the cat. It occurs when the cat is bitten by a tick; usually *Dermacentor variabilis*, or the American dog tick, is involved. A single tick bite can successfully transmit the organism to the cat. The domestic cat is thought to be an “accidental” host for this parasite. The natural reservoir for the organism is the bobcat; in this species, the organism may survive for long periods of time. For this reason, it is often called “Bobcat Disease”.

### **Clinical Signs**

The signs are generally vague. Most owners first report affected cats to be depressed and have a decreased appetite. A very high fever ( $>106^{\circ}$  F) is common. After a day or two, the cat will become anemic and jaundiced (develop a yellow color to the skin and in the mouth) with increasing lethargy. The cat’s temperature may drop significantly at this time. They also cry, making a somewhat distinctive “yowl”. This is thought to be due to the effect of the organism on the heart muscle.

### **Diagnosis**

When this disease is suspected, a stained blood smear is examined in search of the organism. It can often be seen under the microscope with diligent searching. In other cases, the diagnosis may not be made until the cat is autopsied.

### **Risk Factors**

Known risk factors for this disease include the following:

1. Warm weather
2. Access to a wooded outdoor environment
3. Exposure to ticks

### **Treatment**

At this time, there is no uniformly successful treatment for this disease. Therefore, this disease is generally considered to have a 100% fatality rate. Most cats are dead within 5 days from the first observed signs of illness. There are several treatments being tried. However, the cure rate is almost 0%. There is a strain of the organism in a small area of Arkansas that appears to be less fatal. However, strains found outside this tiny area are almost always fatal.

### **Prevention**

The best way to prevent this disease is to eliminate any potential exposure to ticks. The most reliable means for achieving this is keeping the cat indoors. If you have dogs, which have access to the outdoors, ticks may still be brought inside. Check your cat regularly and, should you see any ticks on the cat, remove them with tweezers. Strict tick control is essential.

There is no vaccine for the disease.

### **Transmission to Humans**

This parasite has not been diagnosed in humans. Therefore, to the best of our knowledge, there is no health risk to humans.